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ORGANIZATION

—AND—



RUCKER SMITH

COOPERATION ARE
THE ONLY HOPES FOR
THE BLACK MAN IN
THIS COUNTRY

1916

INTRODUCTORY

It is the aim of the writer to inculcate into the mind of the Colored Race the necessity of organization and co-operation. With this purpose in mind, I have done my best to make plain the primary principles of both

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ORGANIZATION
AND
COOPERATION
ARE THE ONLY HOPES
FOR THE
BLACK MAN IN THIS
COUNTRY

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BY RUCKER SMITH

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ORGANIZATION



THE most interesting part of the United States History to the colored man began in 1861; the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln, the avowed abolitionist, the seceding of the Southern States, forming a solid Southern Confederacy, to make more secure the institution of chattel slavery, and the final climax ending in Lee's surrender at the Appomattox Court House, April 9th, 1865. This great conflict, according to history, cost nearly one million lives, caused to heap up a debt on the government, \$2,845,000,000, besides the millions of dollars never accounted for, the devastated property of the South. This is mentioned to impress upon you the cost of your freedom. Could it have been done for spite or were these people, who gave up their lives, sincere, or did they know what they were doing? Is it possible that a people who fought so bravely to wipe out the curse of chattel slavery, could not solve the problem any better than they have? "What to do with the Negro" was the most perplexing problem immediately after the war, and it is today. The Federal government would severely punish anyone who would attempt to re-enslave the Negro, but the Federal government is not big or powerful enough to give the Negro an equal chance with his white brother. The natural law governing sociability predominates over

statute law. The 13th Amendment was sufficient to give all the colored people every right or privilege, had it been possible to grant those things by law, when we got freedom. There were two questions settled by the war of the 60's: Besides dooming slavery, this war settled forever the question "States' rights," that no State, having once joined the Union, can never secede. Ever since the great emancipator, Lincoln, issued the proclamation making us "free," we have been on a "still" hunt looking for freedom. If we hear of a colored person being treated as a real human being, given a chance according to their ability, free from the "monster prejudice," we wonder is it possible after all that we were mistaken, and have judged a people wrong. But when we look about us and see college girls and boys of our race washing the windows down town and the pots and pans in the homes of the men who run the down town district, we know that we are not mistaken. Yet with these overwhelming facts of our hopeless struggle to make good in a country where the dominant people are extremely prejudiced and after 50 years show no signs of changing, we are yet persuaded to believe that it is for the best and will all come out alright some day. This view of the problem being accepted by so many, is what makes it so serious, even tragical. There is no grounds for this conclusion, after looking over the history of the race for the last 50 years, there is no reason to be-

lieve that it will change without a greater effort than we have put forth in the past.

The one great fault that hinders our progress is lack of organization along labor and industrial lines. For instance, we take our great cities where we make up considerable portion of the population, we find the white worker organized for the purpose of protecting their interest, but the Negroes stand in awe of their unions, without once attempting to organize to meet them on the field of labor. For an example, we take Kansas City to illustrate the real standing of the Negro in this country; what is true here, is about true everywhere. Here at the intersection of the Kaw and Missouri rivers, where the great floods have caused disaster to life and property, the Negro has shown as much loyalty at these periodical, capricious outbursts of these two treacherous rivers as any other citizen, he has unsparingly given his labor, yea, his life at times of great distress; has done his part in lowering the ungainly hills, and digging the tunnels, in building the many magnificent skyscrapers; in every way where real labor was needed, the Negro did his part, the unskilled part. In return for our loyalty we have been given, in most places, some very good public schools to educate our children; these schools are well equipped to prepare our children for any kind of commercial business, just what all schools are for. The great bulk of business could not be carried on if

these schools did not exist. This question might be asked, why do we, as Negroes want schools equal to the whites when our boys and girls have no chance to exercise their commercial education the same as white pupils? If it is true that our schools are mostly for the purpose of fitting our children for commercial life, it can hardly be disputed, why don't we attempt to make places for them, we certainly are convinced now that the white people are not going to do it.

There has been too much talk about success in our race, when in truth, we are going back if anything. We are losing the old jobs we once considered ours, instead of making places in the commercial world, why are we failing? You might say it is prejudice, which is of course, part of the cause, but the main thing is lack of organization: we are well organized religiously, socially, but industrially we stand apart. Whenever the white race wants to do any thing, if it is nothing more than to segregate us, they organize; when we want to do something that is very necessary to our welfare, we make a fuss or ask the white man can we do it. This is a childish weakness that we must rid ourselves of. No matter where you live, if you are colored, there is something going on that is detrimental to the race. Form an organization to fight it; here in Kansas City a certain part of the City had become stagnated as far as business was con-

cerned, about a dozen property owners formed themselves into a boosters club, with one purpose to boost that section of the City, they have accomplished wonderful things through their organization, that could not have been done any other way. There is nothing too big for people to do through proper organization; when we wish to form a social club for the purpose of enjoyment, we always organize, but when we are confronted with some very stiff problem of a racial nature, we wilt away, give up and allow things to take its course, which sometimes is a very serious set back to us. There should be an organization of colored men and women in every commercial center to look after the boys and girls who leave school; see that they get a chance. Any pupil who goes as far as the 8th grade, has a very good commercial education, and should be given a chance; an organization of this kind could induce some of the big concerns to give us at least one clerical department for Negroes. Demand it as your right to have it; ask your city to pass a law against anyone refusing to employ a person on account of his color. They won't do it, of course, but it will serve the purpose of letting the public know that you want recognition as a people. Don't move out of a neighborhood because it is not clean or moral, organize your best people into a society to make it a good place. Don't run from these bad things, but make them run from you. Don't put in too

much time in forming your society, remember the one purpose of your organization, and stick to it, if you run against a stone wall batter it down, it will fall in time. Immorality among our race is one of the main things to fight, we should study the cause of it and try to remove it. There should be an organization in every community against gambling, against booze selling rooming houses, against the revolting vice that exists between white men and colored women. It would be hard to count the number of organizations among the white people. They are organized against every thing that is a menace to their purity, or a drawback to their making a living, we could overcome many of our stubborn problems if we would but apply the system of organization. It is said that we can not stick together, neither can the white people, they are divided on most every thing but there is always a few people who can stick together and these few people are running and shaping things as they would have them to go. The biggest accomplishments are the results of organizations started by a handful of people, but they keep a pounding until they get the required support. No doubt, if we are to get a square deal there should be some form of colonization in this country, for the purpose of development if nothing else. It should be started by those who believe in Colonization and would give it a thorough trial. There should be a National Industrial Union among Negroes; there should be

a national organization advocating colonization; each one should be powerful enough to get the ear of our Government at times of distress. A large organization is always given some consideration.

Five people can start an organization that can be made to do some very effective work. All of the big monied men have an organization for every separate branch of their business, no matter what obstacle may confront them, they usually overcome it. The white working class has a splendid organization to protect themselves against the owning class; even the hoboes among the whites have an organization that is serving for these unfortunate people a good purpose. The same forces that will cause a white man to be a hobo will make the black man a hobo; if there is a need for a hotel to help the unfortunate whites, we are certainly not looking after our own people unless we have them.

If a hotel for working girls of the white race is necessary, in our cities, we should have them also. If the white people have an organization for the suppression of vice, in your city, you need one. They will not look after the vices that exist among colored people as you can, and we should not expect it.

I have mentioned a few of the many organizations needed by our race, but the most important thing about these organizations is the spirit behind them. They must be firm in their undertak-

ings, and allow nothing to sidetrack you or cause you to vary from your purpose. Most of our people in trying to do some good for the race usually call in the preacher, here is where we fail. The preacher is always looking for more support for his church, and after a lengthy talk he is likely to wind up his talk by saying the Lord will look after these things, but he doesn't let the Lord look after his collection. If you want to accomplish anything don't let anyone talk on a subject that is foreign to your purpose. If you are religious don't let that keep you from doing your duty here on earth. The white man is also religious, but he does not allow that to interfere with his doing good on the earth. Besides the many little organizations that are needed to insure progress, the one of the most importance is a National Union of Negroes formed for the express purpose of bettering the working and living conditions of the race. Were you ever standing on the street when a body of Negroes was marching by and have some white person to ask you who are they and what are they doing? In telling them that it was some lodge turning out, the the questioner evinces no farther interest and walks away. It would be much different if we were able to say, why, that's the 'Industrial Union of Negroes of America.' This would strike terror to our white brothers, it would mean something more than a mere show, it would mean real progress for the entire race. Organization is our only hope

for bettering our condition in this life. We have tried for more than fifty years to be patient, obedient, hoping that some unknown power might clear away the many obstacles that are strewn in our pathway. We have watched for some sign or token of friendship from our white brother, showing that our struggles to make good, had not been in vain. We have taken him at his word when he said, "You are too ignorant," and have become, to a great extent, educated, and if it is impossible now for him to take down the bar and recognize us as men and women, it will always be. After viewing the situation in this country, (I don't see how any colored person could come to any other conclusion) the increasing prejudice, the many race riots and the least insignificant offense from one of us in some parts of the country, will bring about a calamity to all of us, we are forced to accept the true state of affairs and work out our own solution. Organization can be made to meet many of our wants. It should be simplified if it is to be effective; in organizations where you are aiming to correct some neighborhood menace, don't think it necessary to advertise in your white paper; don't have a president, elect a chairman at each meeting, pass it around, that will cause more interest to be manifested. It might be wise to have a permanent secretary. Don't beg for money, there is not much need for money in most of the organizations such as the suppression of vice, gambling or prostitution.

Whatever you want or don't want, organize. It is the one best weapon. Try it.



COOPERATION



There is one word in the English language that is so important, so little understood by most of the very people to whom it means so much, it is necessary for me to dwell for a time on its explanation, "Co-operation". I think it should be shortened to co-op, when ever possible, with accent on the op; it sounds better and if shortening this very, very important word will cause more people to grasp its meaning, it certainly will be worth trying.

Co-operation means to the Negro, or the working class, just what corporation means to the rich, or that class who own everything. To co-op means all of us can own and run a thing for all; corporation means that a few can own a necessary article, it might be bread, and make all of us pay their price; some difference; but don't get the two words confused, it might be fatal to you.

On the account of the colored race starting out after the end of chattel slavery, all on about the same level, we had to co-op in many ways in order to live, it was a natural force, we could not help it, we all went together to live, to work, to enjoy ourselves and we are still together, but we don't own any thing together, no industries of any kind. A few Negroes have startled the world,

by their ability to make money, but that cannot be considered a racial advancement, they may have made it off of their own race, causing much suffering. We own several million dollars worth of church and lodge property, but no property that will furnish us a job. Why don't we? Because we have not tried. There should be, in every community where there is a sufficient number of people to have a church, a community owned industry of some kind. When we develop to that state, we can boast of progress.

As slaves, we were house servants, bootblacks, table waiters for our white master. What are we now? Are we not holding the same jobs, when we can get them? Everything is in our favor towards building up industries that would be strictly racial institutions. For instance, in many places we are forced to live in certain neighborhoods, we are forced to work at certain jobs, and many places we are forced to sit in a place on street cars, on trains, at public parks, designated by the white people. All of this has a tendency to make us have, in common, one grievance, one problem for all of us to solve. This being the true state of affairs, why not take the advantage of this forced solidarity and co-operate with one another towards operating industries for ourselves. The spirit of co-operation is prevalent among us everywhere, and it has been tried so

often and failed, we are very suspicious of every movement of this kind.

If the working class of the white race had the same powers at work, forcing them in one indisputable class, as we have, I am sure they would have solved the working class problem long ago. So many of them believe, because a few have gotten out of their class and become rich, all can. We all know that we haven't an equal chance with the poor, white, let alone the rich. There are two reasons for our failures along this line, dishonesty and ignorance; the dishonesty of some individual who was foremost in advocating the "get together", idea, our ignorance of not knowing how to protect our interest. But now, I think, we have reached that place in our struggle for a higher civilization, where we can, without even a chance for failure, co-op successfully. In forming any little co-operative business in the past, the wrong fellow, usually, was selected to run it. Sometimes they were wholly incompetent, besides being dishonest. Men have been selected because of their popularity or because they had more money, and given full power to run things to suit themselves. Right here is where we have failed.

Ability to do business is the first and the most important asset. To be successful we must borrow some ideas from the rich man's corporation. "Make good or get out," there is no compromise, they are cold, relentless and even cruel in their

decision. In the past, Negroes have been easy, in some cases of premeditated robbery we have let the accused go without prosecution, on the account of his family, or because he has been a good man heretofore. No person should hold a position unless qualified, while honesty counts for something, we cannot depend upon that alone. You can make a man honest by placing him in a shape where dishonesty would be disastrous to him. Most all of us have at some time in the past put our money in these co-operative concerns and never got any returns. We were glad to do it, we swelled with pride, thinking of the great possibilities that might develop from such an enterprise, only to be fooled and robbed of our money. But now is the time we can profit by our mistakes, and go about it with more confidence of success. Here is what should be done: First, find out what kind of an enterprise would likely succeed in your particular neighborhood. If there is some special kind of industry peculiarly adapted for that district, and is being successfully carried on by the white capitalist, don't look any farther for an enterprise. Drive your stakes right there. It may look impossible, you will, no doubt, be laughed at for entertaining such a thought, but remember that labor is the creative force that brings into existence all wealth, without the hand of labor there could be no wealth. We, as a race, are rich in this particular line. We have plenty of labor

waiting to be trained to do any, no matter how much skill is needed, kind of honest work. I will cite you a case of racial co-operation among the Italians of a certain city in this country. The Italian ice peddlers were being discriminated against, they could not get ice until everybody else was supplied. This was against them, it made them lose their trade; it was a trick of the big ice concern to force them out of the business, but instead it forced them into business. The ice peddlers called a meeting and discussed the ice business until they reached one conclusion to co-op and build for themselves an ice plant. They did it, and today it is a great enterprise for the ice peddlers of the Italian colony. We could do the same thing in any city, or even, in the country, we could co-op and own many big farms. Just think of more than 20,000 Negroes in a city of 200,000, a distributing point, where you will find more than 200 large wholesale houses, and not one of them owned by a colored person, not even one department in any of them run by Negroes, not a Negro holding a clerical job in any of them; this state of affairs is not progress.

I would like to, in this movement of bringing together members of the race, through a National Organization, in time, find enough people to co-op and build some great industrial institution, giving our race a chance to demonstrate their true worth. There are many ways to be

defrauded in such undertakings, besides, the ever-present chance of failure by mistakes. The grafter looms up as our greatest danger, this scoundrel has misled and wrecked every good start we have had toward co-operation. Most every member of the race is ready for co-operation, but the grafter is one obstacle, hard to overcome.

Here is one plan I shall offer to head off the grafter: Do no do business with a stranger until you are thoroughly convinced you are right. Say for instance, 500 people had agreed to put in \$10.00 a piece to do a certain thing, of course some one will have to handle this money and they must be made responsible for the money. Surety companies are glad at all times to do business with us, and if a person should be rejected by the surety company, we could not use them. Another thing to avoid is, the one man proposition or "my co-operative concern," there is no such thing as one man running a co-op, it can not be co-operative unless every member is as big as everybody else in the co-op. We may choose someone competent to fill a certain place, but is subject to removal by a vote of the co-op. There have been co-operative stores started where one man run them because he had the most money invested, they usually fail with everybody loser but the one man who ran them. With many of such irregularities happening everywhere

is our greatest drawback in starting something of any magnitude.

We want an industrial organization of such a proportion that nothing will be considered too big for it to undertake. When we, as a race can organize to the extent of a few 100,000 men and build industries that will aggregate several million dollars, then we shall be on the road to a solution to the Negro problem. Nobody has ever gained recognition without making some definite effort towards firmness of purpose or showing power of some sort. Weakness is always despised by the stronger, even though, the strong have made them weak. The time has come when we shall have to show our worth, whether we are fit to survive; asking favors will not be tolerated long, we will face the world as failures. Let us do something.

THE END

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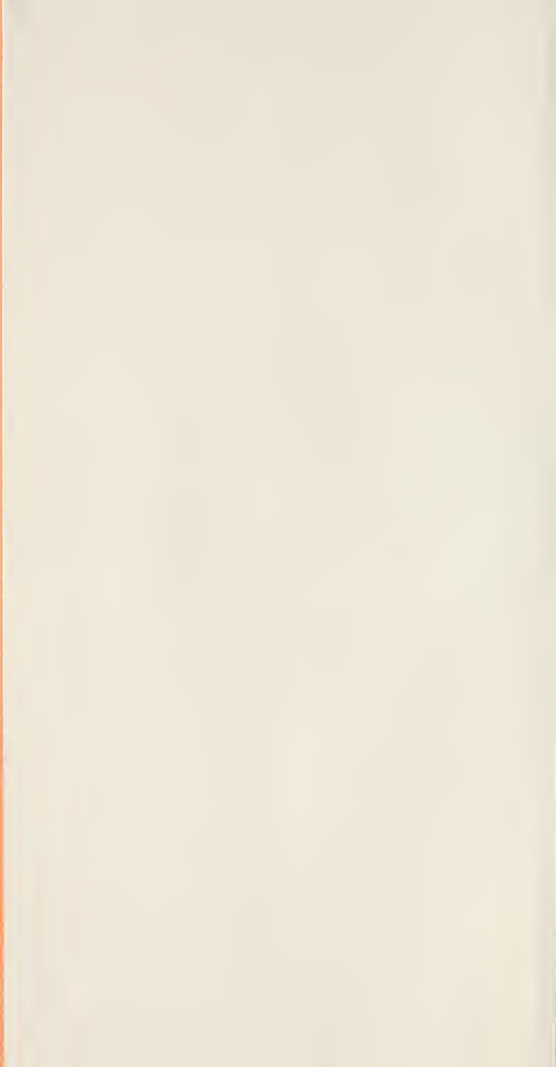
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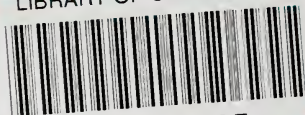
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